

Hakusan National Park

<BROCHURE/OUTER PAGES>

<FRONT COVER>

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<INTRO PAGE>

Hakusan

The peak where sacred and natural meet

The heart of Hakusan National Park is Mt. Hakusan, which rises to a towering 2,702 meters; the park extends into Ishikawa, Fukui, Gifu and Toyama prefectures. This mountain is also one of Japan's most sacred, along with Mt. Fuji and Mt. Tateyama. Its name means "white mountain," and during the winter it is covered with a thick layer of snow. In the spring, green shoots push through the snow, eventually leading to the fields of colorful alpine flowers that bloom throughout the summer. During the autumn, the forests are tinged with flaming red, orange, and yellow leaves.

The mountain has been considered sacred ever since Buddhist priest Taicho (682–767) climbed it in 717. Taicho was a practitioner of Shugendo, a religion that combines Buddhism, Shinto and mountain worship. Practitioners often train and perform ascetic rites on sacred mountains. This connection to the sacred is evidenced by Hakusan Shirayama-Hime Okumiya Shrine, which is located at the top of Gozengamine (2,702 m), the highest of Hakusan's three peaks. The Hakusan Okumiya prayer hall is located in front of the Murodo mountain hut.

When conditions are right, visitors may get to witness a "sea of clouds" (*unkai*), an impressive layer of unbroken clouds seen from above, with the peaks of the Northern Japanese Alps towering in the distance.

Hakusan is a volcano, with its last known eruption occurring in 1659. Although quiet today, it still heats the many hot springs (*onsen*) around its base.

A wide range of ecosystems thrive on Hakusan. Visitors who climb the mountain will pass through forests of Japanese beech (*buna*) and Erman's birch (*dakekanba*). Higher up, the

trees thin out and give way to alpine meadows dotted with colorful flowers throughout the summer, some named after the mountain, such as *Hakusan kozakura* (*Primula cuneifolia* Ledeb. var. *hakusanensis*) and *Hakusan furo* (*Geranium yesoemse* var. *nipponicum*). Many mammals, birds and amphibians inhabit the park, including golden eagles, foxes, and Asiatic black bears. Hakusan was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve site in 1980.

<MOUNTAIN WEATHER, TEMPERATURES, SUNRISE AND SUNSET TIMES PAGE>

Temperatures are based on averages of past years and are subject to change. Be sure to check the current weather forecast before hiking.